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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000185

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR H AND EAP/MTS/COPPOLAMG.

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO SENATOR NELSON

E.O.: 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL NELSON VISIT TO BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Senator Nelson: Your August 16-18 visit to Brunei comes at an opportune moment. Our bilateral relationship with Brunei continues to improve as The Government of Brunei (GoB), lead by His Majesty the Sultan, seeks closer ties with the United States. Particular attention is focused on expanding military to military cooperation, increasing the numbers of Bruneians studying in the United States, strengthening law enforcement cooperation especially in the areas of counter terrorism and transnational crime, and economic diversification that still protects Brunei's impressive natural wonders. While Brunei is a moderate Muslim nation, issues of religious freedom and lack of representational government remain.

Your visit coincides with annual U.S. and Bruneian joint military exercises. We welcome your visit as a strong sign of the U.S engagement with Brunei. End Summary

BRUNEI'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

¶2. (SBU) Above all, Brunei seeks a balanced and cautious approach in its foreign policy. As a small, but wealthy nation, Brunei is friendly but deliberate in bilateral and regional relations. Brunei is an ASEAN member and is a close adherent to the "consensus" decision making model within the ASEAN forum. The same can be said for Brunei's approach within other regional and international organizations. Brunei is a moderating voice with the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), reflecting His Majesty, the Sultan's views on Islam and its role in the political spectrum. The Sultan has close personal ties with leaders of many Arab Gulf countries. Brunei normally does not take a leadership role in regional or international organizations, preferring to "work within" the organizations.

¶3. (SBU) Engagement with the United States is growing as Brunei seeks to diversify from the traditional ties with the United Kingdom. Bruneian leaders have repeatedly stated they respect the U.S role in Asia and welcome constructive engagement in Southeast Asia. Exposure to the United States remains limited for many Bruneians, including senior Government of Brunei (GoB) officials. The GoB is encouraging, with Embassy support, more military to military engagements, strong educational ties, economic diversification, and environmental protection. GoB sees the U.S. as a leader and innovator in all of these areas.

MILITARY TIES AND COUNTER TERRORISM

¶4. (SBU) Brunei values the military ties it shares with the U.S. Through joint exercises such as Cooperation and Readiness Afloat Training (CARAT) and Southeast Asian Cooperation Against Terrorism (SEACAT), Brunei and the US are forging closer military to military cooperation. Your visit coincides with SEACAT, which will focus on ship board counter terrorism exercises and training. Brunei's military continues to focus on developing its capabilities, especially in the areas of disaster relief and peace keeping operations. Brunei participates in peacekeeping operations in the Philippines and Lebanon. Brunei has cadets in both West Point and the U.S. Air Force Academy. Brunei's junior officer corps sees the

U.S. Military's training as a model and Brunei's Ministry of Defense is incorporating aspects of U.S. Military training into its curriculum.

15. (SBU) Brunei's military, through SEACAT and other exercises is seeking to expand their counter terrorism capabilities. Maritime security remains a key concern, in conjunction with protecting strategic resources such as the oil and gas platforms. The ability to protect territorial waters is an area of primary focus for Brunei.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION AND COUNTER TERRORISM

16. (SBU) Embassy Brunei, with the support of U.S. law enforcement agencies, is expanding outreach and cooperation with Brunei's civilian law enforcement. Brunei is an active participant in trainings offered at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok. U.S. civilian law enforcement agencies have increased specialized trainings to a number of Bruneian civilian law enforcement agencies, as part of Ambassador Todd and the U.S. embassy's outreach program. Maritime security, as with the Bruneian military, is a paramount concern. While enhanced training is beneficial, increased information sharing will bolster our efforts not only in combating transnational crime but in ongoing counter terrorism programs.

ECONOMY

17. (SBU) Brunei's wealth is overwhelming generated by its oil and natural gas reserves. The public sector accounts for almost three quarters of direct employment and drives much of the economy through government expenditures. Brunei is seeking economic diversification

BANDAR SER 00000185 002 OF 002

but progress has been slow to date. Brunei continues to seek to specialize in certain niche industries, including Islamic finance. The development of new oil and gas reserves could stunt further diversification efforts but Brunei's leaders remain publicly committed to seeking a more diverse economy. Brunei views the U.S., especially in education, as leader and is increasing the number of Brunei students studying in the U.S. GoB officials believe exposure to the U.S. education system will bolster innovation and creating thinking amongst young Bruneians and encourage the development of new industries within Brunei.

ENVIRONMENT

18. (SBU) While Brunei derives its wealth from its natural resources; it has also sought to protect them. Over 70 percent of the country is currently preserved from development. Much of this is under the Heart of Borneo (HoB) initiative. Brunei's efforts under Heart of Borneo are focused on conservation. The areas under conservation are remote and difficult to access and the conservation plans hope to ensure they are maintain in this pristine state. Brunei also is exploring ways to increase development of other energy sources, such as solar power. GoB officials are working to promote ecotourism as a way to diversify the economy. However, tourism infrastructure, as well as the ecotourism industry, is still developing.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

19. (SBU) Brunei is an absolute monarchy. Nevertheless, there is a Legislative Council that meets yearly to discuss various matters, mostly focused on the Government's budget. There are local elections, however many of the Legislative Council members are appointed by the Sultan to represent various Brunei communities. There is one official political party, the National Development Party (NDP), which pledges full support to the Sultan. The Sultan has broad powers under the Internal Security Act put into effect in 1983. Brunei adheres to a Malay Islamic Monarchy belief system, which promotes moderate Islamic values within a monarchial political system. The GoB speaks out against religious extremism and religious freedom is part of Brunei's constitution. However, there have been some restrictions placed on non-Islamic faiths. The press is self censored but open and accommodating to US Embassy public diplomacy efforts.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

¶10. (SBU) Many years have passed since a CODEL visited Brunei. Bruneian officials greatly value visits from senior government officials, especially the United States. Your visit, as noted, reaffirms our engagement with Brunei. Your meetings with His Majesty, the Sultan, the Foreign Minister, Prince Mohamed, and the Crown Prince will be cordial and productive. The friendship of the United States is valued. The royal family, senior GoB officials, and any Bruneian you speak with will appreciate the opportunity to meet you and Mrs. Nelson. The capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, is small, compact, and easily explored in a day. Brunei is an oasis of calm and Bruneians enjoy a high standard of living and security. You can expect exceptional hospitality both from your Bruneian and American hosts. We truly appreciate your visit.

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